

# *The Trailing Edge*

April 2024

## **The State of Surreality – I can't believe I just did that!**



“Surreality” is not a word you often hear in normal conversation, but it does describe my state of mind during my recent solo cross-country flight. Here in the real world, I arrived at the Edwards Air Force Base (AFB) Aero Club Office at 0800 on 22 Mar 2024. I knew that I'd either be flying a dual cross-country to the LA Basin or a solo cross country to Bakersfield Municipal Airport (KBFL). I had planned a route for both trips, had studied both routes, and was well prepared. My instructor, Bishoy Abraham, and I referred to Foreflight to discuss the weather conditions. I had looked at Foreflight earlier and while the weather at one of my destination airports in the LA basin was currently marginal VFR, the forecast showed it improving

to acceptable VFR weather later in the morning. From general knowledge, I knew that airports along the coast of the LA basin were often marginal VFR in the early morning due to the marine layer. This marine layer of clouds usually “burned off” later in the morning. Given that, I concluded that we should have good weather for the LA Basin trip. Bishoy showed me a few tricks with Foreflight that would give me more information about the wider area we would be flying through. After viewing that info, it was clear that even though our destination airport weather would be fine, our path back north would probably be marginal or even IFR. This was my first learning moment of the day. We abandoned the LA trip and made the decision that I would fly the solo trip to KBFL.

As we discussed my flight plan, I looked at the paperwork for Cessna Skyhawk N108ED, the aircraft I had reserved for the flight. Some quick calculations based on the previous flights told me there would only be about 25 gallons of fuel left in the plane. That fuel load wasn't enough to accomplish my flight. Since the fuel pit at KEDW was currently inoperative, I'd have to fly to nearby William J. Fox Airport (KWJF or Fox Field as we call it) to fuel up prior to flying to KBFL. This would be the first time I'd fueled an airplane off base by myself. After we were both satisfied with my flight planning, Bishoy input the necessary endorsements in my Foreflight logbook for KBFL and KWJF.

For this cross-country solo flight, I'd be taking off from Edwards South Base Runway 25/7. Edwards AFB has two large parallel runways on the main base (23L/5R and 23R/5L), but due to the complex and diverse military aircraft traffic, solo students are not allowed to operate out of the main base runways. Since the Aero Club Cessna 172 Skyhawks are parked at Main Base, an instructor must chaperone students to South Base for solo flights. At approximately 0830 on 22 Mar 2024, Bishoy and I stepped out to the airplane for the short hop to South Base. We taxied to and took off on runway 23R, made a left turn-out toward South Base, established a left downwind to runway 25, and landed. I turned off the runway and taxied back to the ramp where a truck was waiting to give Bishoy a ride back to the Aero Club offices. Since there were no other aircraft or vehicles around, Bishoy told me to stop on the taxiway adjacent to the ramp. He asked me the two questions he always asks me before a solo flight. “If you need help or get any non-standard comms you don't understand?” I replied, “Tell them I'm a student pilot solo.” If you don't like your approach to landing?” “I do a go-around.” With that, he smiled, gave me a fist bump, hopped out of the airplane and walked toward the waiting truck.

I waited for Bishoy to walk well away from the airplane and pushed in some power to start taxiing toward the threshold of runway 25. Two weeks prior, I had attempted this same solo flight to KBFL, but ran into a low cloud deck about halfway through the trip. I was uncomfortable flying over the Tehachapi mountains due to the low clouds, so I made the prudent decision to do a “one-eighty” and return to base. I learned a ton from that first attempted solo cross-country flight, and that experience gave me a measure of confidence. I was much more relaxed for this flight. Still, I did have a bit of nervous tension. I had two primary worries in the back of my mind. First, I was apprehensive about spotting the KBFL airport in time to do a good approach. I've found that airports are sometimes difficult to see from the air. Secondly, I was a bit hesitant about the radio communication with Bakersfield approach and tower. I, of course, have talked with Fox and Edwards approach and tower dozens of times, but this was a more unfamiliar airport. To mitigate this worry, I had studied the approach and rehearsed the radio calls I expected, so I was as prepared as I could be. I used the nervous energy to help me focus.

I stopped the airplane at the hold short line of runway 25 and set the power to 1000 RPM. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly as has become my practice before a solo flight. That little exercise helps me to relax and focus. I went through the Before Takeoff checklist: fuel selector both, fuel shutoff in, trim to takeoff, mixture full rich, flaps up for a standard takeoff, engine in the green, transponder 1200 VFR, and lights all on. I glanced at the radio display to make sure I was on Edwards tower frequency and keyed the mic, "Edwards tower, Skyhawk one-zero-eight-echo-delta (108ED), holding short South Base runway 25, ready for takeoff with delta, westgate departure." Tower responded, "8ED winds 190 at 11, altimeter 3004, westgate departure approved, report airborne." "3004, westgate approved & report airborne, 8ED." For those unfamiliar with Edwards AFB operations, the South Base runway is too far and obstructed by buildings for the tower to see clearly, so they cannot clear pilots for takeoff. They expect pilots to see and avoid other traffic and request you report when you're airborne. I checked the runway and the approach path. Seeing no traffic, I pushed in some power and rolled out to line up on centerline. I applied full power, added a little bit of right rudder to stay on centerline, confirmed the engine was putting out full power at 2350 RPM, and as the airspeed increased to 55 KIAS, I eased the yoke back to set takeoff attitude. At 0932L on 22 Mar 2024, I lifted off runway 25 into a gorgeous California clear blue sky! "Edwards tower, 8ED airborne." And just like that, I was off on another solo adventure!



As I climbed away from the runway, Edwards tower gave me some further instructions, "8ED, you're cleared right turn direct westgate and report westgate." "8ED, right turn direct westgate and I'll report westgate." Westgate is a local visual waypoint to the west of the field. It is published for VFR traffic to enter and exit the Edwards Restricted area R-2515 and the Edwards Class D airspace. It's very easy to see from the air because it's the actual West Security Checkpoint Gate for vehicle traffic. In addition, there's an outdoor museum right outside the entrance gate. It's called Century Circle and displays 6 century-series fighter aircraft in service from the 1950s to the 1970s: The F-100 Super Sabre, the F101 Voodoo, the F102 Delta Dagger, the F-104 Starfighter,

the F-105 Thunderbolt, and the F106B Delta Dart. In addition, the YC-15 aircraft is displayed near the Century Circle. The YC-15 was a prototype cargo aircraft that was the predecessor to the incredible C-17A heavy-lift cargo aircraft that is currently in the Air Force inventory. This is one of the many cool things about flying out of Edwards AFB. If you're plane crazy (not plain crazy) like me and you've never seen this outdoor museum, I highly recommend it. It is open to the public since it is located just outside the West Gate. While still on the ground, I'd set my altitude bug to 3,300 MSL which is pattern altitude for Eddie Airpatch. As soon as I reached 3,300 MSL, I leveled off and turned toward westgate.



As I reached westgate, I keyed the mic, "Edwards tower, 8ED, westgate." "8ED, copy, contact Sport on 132.75." "Over to Sport 132.75, thank you, 8ED." "Sport, Skyhawk 108ED checking in passing westgate, outbound." "8ED, copy that, would you like us to get you flight following?" "Not at this time, Sport, I'm heading to Fox for fuel, 8ED." "8ED frequency change approved, have a good day." "Frequency changed approved, thank you, 8ED." This surprised me a bit, because I was not quite out of R-2515. Nevertheless, I turned toward Fox Field and tuned the Fox ATIS (126.3) frequency into the comm 1 radio, set the Fox tower frequency (118.525) in comm 1 standby, and set Fox ground frequency (121.7) into comm 2. Fox ATIS information told me the wind was 230° at 10 kts, altimeter was 30.05, and runway 24 was active. Unfortunately, Fox Field must have forgotten to put in a phonetic letter code at the end. I listened to the automated ATIS message 3 times and where the identifier is usually announced there was just static. Hmmm, interesting. I pushed the button to switch comm 1 from ATIS to Fox tower.

As I approached Fox Field, I gave tower a radio call, "Fox tower, Skyhawk 108ED, about 10 miles east, inbound to land, with the numbers, full stop." I added "with the numbers" because I had no phonetic letter code to report. Fox tower responded, Skyhawk 108ED, make straight in to runway 24 and report 3 mile final." "Fox tower, 8ED straight in to runway 24 and report 3 mile final." As I was driving in, I heard another aircraft in the pattern and tower asked them if they could turn a short base. They said they could. Tower told them to turn base immediately, cleared them to land, told them a Cessna 172 was number 2 on a 7 mile straight-in behind them, and told them to report off runway.

I drove in until I was about 3 miles out. "Fox tower, 8ED, 3 mile final." "8ED, you're number two to land behind a Cirrus, on a right base, cleared for the option runway 24." "#2 behind Cirrus, I'll look for the traffic, cleared to land runway 24, and this will be a full stop, 8ED." "8ED copy full stop." I saw the Cirrus turning a very short final, they'd definitely be off the runway by the time I got there. I started configuring my aircraft. Throttle to 1700 RPM, confirm below 110 KIAS, 10° of flaps, push the nose down a bit. The aircraft slowed and as airspeed decreased below 85, I put in 20° of flaps. They were calling steady winds, but I noticed the wind was gusting a bit. I noted the plane in front of me was off the runway, added the last 10° of flaps, and added some power to stay on glideslope and keep the plane at about 70 KIAS because of the small gusts. I rounded out, flared and made a decent landing. I turned off the runway, "Fox tower 8ED clear of runway 24." "Copy, 8ED, what's your intentions." "Fox tower, I need to taxi to the FBO to get some gas, 8ED." "8ED, taxi to ramp via Alpha 6, Alpha, remain this frequency." "Taxi to ramp via Alpha 6, Alpha, and remain this frequency, 8ED."

I followed the taxi instructions and turned off onto the ramp. At first, I had trouble finding where I should park. But, as I slowly rolled forward, I found the familiar "parking T's." I parked in a spot that was nearest to the taxiway Alpha and away from the buildings. I shut down the engine and called the fuel truck on my cell phone with the number Bishoy had given me earlier. I told them I was with the Edwards Aero Club and needed a top off. The gentleman said he'd be there soon, but I was number two in line. I told him thank you and hung up. I texted Bishoy and told him I was at Fox waiting for fuel. I unbuckled and stepped out of the airplane to wait... and wait... and wait. I landed and shut down at 1011L, and it was 1050L before I had gas and was ready for engine start. The only good part about the wait was that I had the opportunity to watch several airplanes land and takeoff, including one of our sister airplanes Skyhawk 106ED, several other small general aviation airplanes, and 2 MD-87 jet aircraft painted with a beautiful orange and white color scheme and "Erickson Aero Tanker" emblazoned on the side. The Erickson jet is a water bomber that fights forest fires. I wondered if there was a forest fire somewhere, or if these pilots were just getting some proficiency training. I hope it was the latter.

The fuel truck finally arrived and fueled my airplane. As soon as I had gas, I hopped back in and started the engine. After engine start, I listened to ATIS. Then, I took a couple minutes to input the altimeter setting, correct fuel load, a "direct-to" KBFL route into the G1000, and the frequencies I'd need in my outbound leg. I called Fox ground, "Fox ground, Skyhawk 108ED, ready to taxi with Victor, request right crosswind departure to the North, and can you guys help me request flight following?" "8ED, where's your destination?" "I'll be heading to Bakersfield, Kilo Bravo Foxtrot Lima." "8ED, taxi to runway 24 via Alpha, Alpha 7, and we'll get you a squawk code in a few minutes." "Taxi to runway 24 via Alpha, Alpha 7, and thank you very much for your help, 8ED." I pushed in the power, did a U-turn on the ramp and headed toward taxiway Alpha. As I approached the taxiway, I saw another airplane on the taxiway and stopped. About the same time, I heard from Fox ground, "8ED hold position for taxiing traffic." "8ED holding position." The airplane taxied past and Fox ground said, "8ED, continue taxi and your squawk code is 4706." I wrote it down and repeated, "8ED will continue taxi and squawk 4706." I input the squawk code into the transponder as I taxied. I reached taxiway Alpha 7 near the threshold of runway 24 and pulled off into the engine run-up area. I did an engine run-up, did a before takeoff check, and took a moment to clear my head and think about what I'd be doing in the next few minutes. I taxied up to the hold short line and stopped.

I changed over to Fox tower, "Fox tower, Skyhawk 108ED holding short runway 24 at A7, ready for takeoff with victor, request right downwind departure." Shortly after receiving a takeoff and departure clearance, I pushed in full power and lifted off Fox runway 24 at 1115. When I cleared the end of the runway, I turned a right crosswind and continued my climb on departure as I flew North toward the Rosamond Skypark (my first visual navigation point) and the Rosamond Hills. I reached the edge of the Fox Class D airspace, "8ED, frequency change approved, have a good day." "Frequency changed approved and thank you for all the help." They didn't hand me off to Joshua as I expected. No problem, I already have a squawk code. I switched comm 1 over to Joshua (133.65). "Joshua, Skyhawk 108ED with you, 5,300 climbing to 8,500, VFR request." "Aircraft with VFR request, say again." "Joshua, Skyhawk 108ED, 5,500 climbing to 8,500, VFR request." "8ED, ident and say destination." I pushed the ident button. "Joshua, 8ED ident and I'm headed to Bakersfield." "8ED, radar contact 10 miles north of Fox field, altimeter 3004." "3004, 8ED." I suppose even though Fox tower didn't hand me off to Joshua, the squawk code I had requested and received from Fox ground was in the system. I continued north toward my planned flight path over Rosamond Hills as I flew to the west of the Rosamond Skypark runway. Then from Joshua, "8ED say next navigation waypoint." "Joshua, my next waypoint is Tehachapi muni and then I'll turn toward Bakersfield." "8ED, thank you." I wondered why they asked me for my next navigation point. Back on the ground, I told one of pilot friends about the request, and he said that since I wasn't pointed directly to KBFL, they just wanted to know what my plan was. Oh, of course, that makes perfect sense. I had set my altitude bug to 8,500 and leveled off when I reached that altitude. I set my throttle to the cruise setting, checked the engine instruments, and smiled. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. This trip was much smoother than the last attempt. By that time, I'd passed over the Rosamond Hills and was flying toward Tehachapi

Muni. I made sure I had the airplane trimmed up and started tuning all the frequencies I'd need into the radio. I wanted to stay ahead of the airplane. I currently had Joshua in comm 1. I tuned Bakersfield ATIS (118.6) in comm 2 and switched it into the primary position. Then I entered Bakersfield tower (118.1) into the comm 2 standby. I entered Bakersfield approach (118.8) into the comm 1 standby. That's the frequency I'd need next. I crosschecked the engine instruments, noting RPM, then altitude and airspeed. I pushed the button to monitor Bakersfield ATIS. Information November told me that winds were 120 at 5, 10 miles viz, altimeter 3006 and they were landing 12 left and right. I switched off ATIS, switched Bakersfield tower into the comm 2 primary position, and dialed in Bakersfield ground (121.7) into the standby. I dialed 30.06 into my altimeter. At this point, I took time to admire the beauty around me. I looked down and saw I was passing the Mountain Valley Airport where my friend Russ instructs glider students. I looked down on the town of Tehachapi and gazed at the mountains around me. Up here, you get a whole different view of our world. There's really nothing like flying, is there?

Joshua interrupted my reverie, "8ED, contact Bakersfield approach on 118.8." "Over to Bakersfield approach 118.8, thank you for your help, sir, 8ED." I pushed the button to switch Bakersfield approach into comm 1 primary. "Bakersfield Approach, Skyhawk 108ED checking in, 8,500, inbound to land with November." "8ED, Bakersfield approach, landing runway 12L and 12R, altimeter 3006." "3006, 8ED." I had turned from my planned heading to the west. I was thinking I'd head a little more directly toward KBFL to cut off some distance and time, but as I passed over Tehachapi Muni Airport and got closer to the Tehachapi Mountains, I saw the mountains were higher and more rugged in that area. Given that, I decided to turn back northeast to intercept my original heading, follow the valley, and traverse the mountains at the lower mountain pass. This seemed to be safer to me and would keep me on my planned path.

After I passed over the Tehachapi Mountains, I turned west toward KBFL on a heading of 285°. I also started a descent into Bakersfield. In my flight plan, I had calculated that I'd need 24 NM to descend to traffic pattern altitude. The G1000 told me I was 28 NM from the airport. I might be a little farther out than necessary, but I could start the descent now. I pushed the nose over and trimmed for about 500 ft/min descent. I set my altitude bug to 1,500 and set my heading bug to 120° to help me pick out the correct runway. "8ED, enter a left base for runway 12L." This is what I was expecting. "Left base for runway 12L, 8ED." I kept driving in and descending. I got to my next visual waypoint which is where some railroad tracks meet Highway 58. I was surprised that this was a very easily identified waypoint from the airplane. I had expected it to be harder to see. By this time, I was down to about 5,000 ft. My next (and final) waypoint was KBFL, and I was about 14 miles away. The pattern altitude at KBFL is 1,500 ft, so I think this descent is going to work out just fine.



**General stock pic of Tehachapi Mountains**

I think I can see the airport. It's an open area to the northeast of the city with buildings around it. As I get closer, I can tell that's definitely an airfield. Now, I'm looking out my left window to see I can find Bakersfield Municipal (L45) which is a small non-towered airport about 7 miles southeast of KBFL. I want to make sure I'm not headed toward L45 instead of KBFL. Unfortunately, I can't spot it. But looking at my Foreflight, my flight path is right over the magenta line and headed directly toward KBFL. I think I'm good. As I get closer, I see two parallel runways and know that I'm headed to the right airfield. "8ED, contact Bakersfield tower on 118.1." "Over to tower 118.1, 8ED." I push the comm 2 button, ensured 118.1 is green. I figured since I've been talking to approach, I don't have to tell tower my position. "Bakersfield tower, Skyhawk 108ED inbound to land with November, full stop." "8ED report left downwind runway 12L." "8ED will report left downwind runway 12L." I reach pattern altitude a couple miles out from the airport. I leveled out, set my power to 2350 RPM and trim for level flight. I make a right turn into a left downwind for runway 12L. Next, I do my before landing GUMPS check. Gas on both, undercarriage down and locked (it's fixed), mixture full rich, prop spinning (not a constant speed), Seatbacks\belts upright and locked, and lights all on. Now I'm ready to land.

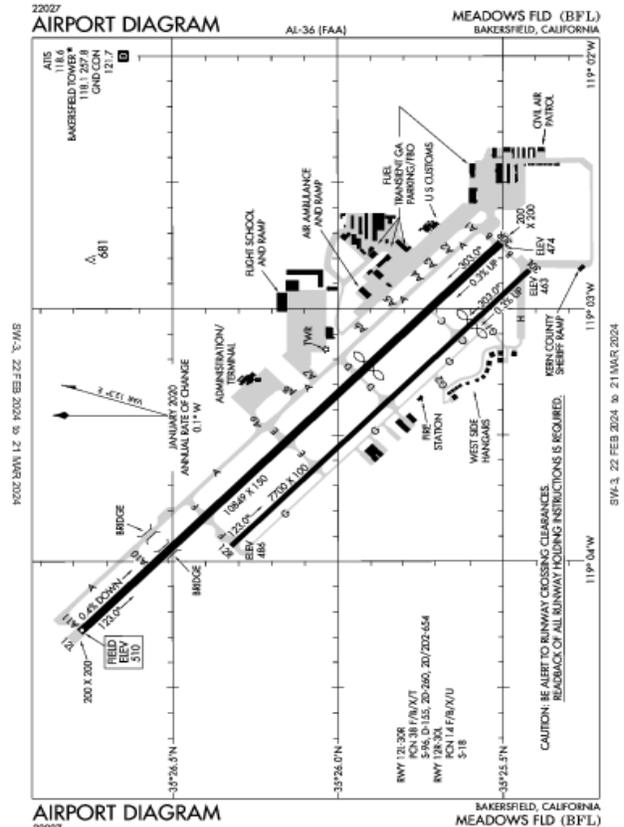
As I approach mid-field, "Bakersfield tower, 8ED, left midfield downwind for runway 12L." "Copy, 8ED, your traffic is on a right downwind for runway 12R, cleared to land runway 12L, caution for wake turbulence due to landing heavy aircraft." "Cleared to land runway 12L, and I'll look out for the traffic and wake turbulence, 8ED." The wake turbulence call made me uneasy. I could see the 727-size jet aircraft touching down on 12L. I watched him for a few seconds as he continued his long landing roll, eventually slowing enough to start a slow turn off the runway. It was a delightful thing to see a commercial jet land from this vantage point. I thought I'd be safe from the wake given that

the wind was right down the runway, there was no quartering tailwind, and it would most likely be over two minutes before I turn final. Still, I'd be prepared to go around if it gets bumpy. Looking back, all those thoughts ran through my head in a matter of seconds; I guess Bishoy has done a pretty good job with my training. I couldn't see the traffic over on the 12R downwind at this point, but I'd keep looking.

Now I'm at the perch point (abeam threshold). I pull throttle to 1700 RPM, check airspeed is below 110 KIAS, and lower my flaps to 10°. I check over my shoulder looking for my cue of 45° diagonal to threshold, and when I get it, turn base. As I turn base, I see my traffic. They're turning base for 12R, and they're below me and to the southeast. As you can tell from the KBFL airport diagram 12R is a shorter runway than 12L, and the 12R threshold is farther to the southeast than 12L. The traffic was in front of me on the 12R side and was no factor. Now I'm established on base and see that I turned base too early and I'm coming in very high. I immediately put in 20° of flaps and pulled some power. I start a turn to final, lowered the flaps to full, and pulled the power to idle. This is not a good approach, I'm still not coming down fast enough, but I think I can land it safely. I put it in a slip to lose some altitude, but I'm still high and coming in way too fast at 80 KIAS. "8ED, no need to respond, but after landing turn off the runway on taxiway delta." I did what I've seen Bishoy do a few times. I pressed the mic button two quick times to acknowledge that I'd heard, but I was concentrating on the landing. As I rounded out, I knew I was going to float a long way down the runway, especially since there was virtually no headwind. And float I did... and floated. It took a long time for my speed to bleed off, but I kept it above the runway at the appropriate altitude and attitude. As the plane started to sink a bit, I eased the yoke back, but due to the speed got a slight balloon. I relaxed the back pressure on the yoke a bit, but still maintaining the landing attitude. The plane slowed and started to settle again, and I kept gently increasing back pressure. I touched down fairly softly, but at a faster airspeed than normal. As the plane slowed, I started to get a sort-of high-frequency bucking action. Sort of like a porpoise, but I was on the ground. I must have lowered the nose too soon or too hard given the airplane speed? I applied the brakes harder, pulled back on the yoke, and rode out the "bucking," although it stopped quickly when I applied the brakes and backpressure. It was a bit disconcerting. My approach and landing was terrible – the worst one I've done in months. I was disappointed in myself to say the least.

After slowing down enough, I started to taxi down to taxiway delta and looked at the taxiway sign I was just passing. It said taxiway Foxtrot. As I taxied toward taxiway delta, I realized I still had a long distance to taxi. I also noticed I could turn either left or right off the runway. I keyed the mic, "tower, 8ED, confirm you want me to turn left onto delta?" "8ED, what are your intentions?" "Sir, I'm going to be requesting a taxi back, 8ED." "8ED, turn left on taxiway delta and report clear of runway." "Left on delta and report clear of runway, 8ED." I passed by taxiway echo and was approaching delta. I turned off and stopped past the hold short line. "Bakersfield tower, 8ED is clear of runway 12L." "8ED, contact ground on 121.7." "8ED will contact ground on 121.7." I switched over to the ground frequency, "Bakersfield ground, 8ED request taxi back to threshold." ....no answer. I waited for about 20 seconds. There was no traffic on the channel either. I checked the comm 2 radio frequency was set on 121.7 and repeated, "Bakersfield ground, 8ED request taxi back to threshold." Again, no answer. Hmmm. I checked the frequency in Foreflight, 121.7 was correct. "Bakersfield ground, 8ED, how read?" Nothing. That's strange. I switched back over to Bakersfield tower, "Bakersfield tower, I apologize, but I can't raise ground, can you confirm the frequency is 121.7." "A-firm, 8ED, 121.7." "Thank you, I'll try again, 8ED." I switched back over to 121.7. Made sure the frequency was green. I keyed the button and made sure I saw "Tx" in the radio window to make sure it's transmitting as I said, "Bakersfield ground, 8ED request taxi back to threshold." No response. I keyed 121.7 into comm 1, pushed the button to turn it green in the display, "Bakersfield ground, 8ED, how read?" Nothing. This time

the



I reached over to the other yoke, pushed it's push-to-talk (PTT) button and repeated, "Bakersfield ground, 8ED, how read?" Again, no response. At this point, I sat there a few seconds to think about what else I could try. Nothing came to mind. I pushed the comm 2 button and switched it over to tower frequency again. "Bakersfield tower, 8ED, I still can't reach ground, can you guys help me out please?" I wasn't expecting them to give me taxi instructions, I just didn't know what to do at that point; but they did, "8ED, A-firm, taxi to runway 12L via Alpha, Alpha 1-1." Thankfully, they were not too busy to help. I started the taxi, "Taxi to runway 12L via alpha, alpha 1-1, and thanks a ton for the help, 8ED." "8ED, what's your departure route?" "Request a straight-out departure to the south toward Edwards AFB and flight following, 8ED." "OK, 8ED, you're approved a straight-out departure, your departure frequency is 126.45 and squawk 5131. I wrote it all down on my kneeboard and repeated it back, "8ED is approved a straight-out departure, departure frequency is 126.45, and squawk 5131." I entered the squawk code into the transponder as I taxied.

When I reached taxiway alpha 11, I pulled off into the run-up area to catch my breath and get my mind focused on the leg home. I looked at Foreflight and pressed the "uno reverse" button and presto-chango, I had the flight plan home in front of me. I love Foreflight! I reviewed the plan closely, changed the cruise altitude to 7,500 MSL since I was now traveling East, set my altitude bug to 7,500, and thought about what frequencies I needed in my radio. I was currently talking to tower (118.1) on comm 2. I put Bakersfield ATIS into comm 1 and pushed the monitor button. It was still on information November. I input Bakersfield departure (126.45) into comm 2 standby, Joshua (133.65) into comm 1 primary and Sport (132.75) into comm 1 standby. I pushed the direct-to button on the G1000 and entered KEDW and pressed enter twice. I looked over to ensure the map showed the direct route -- it did. Finally, I did my Before Takeoff checklist: Fuel selector both, fuel shutoff valve in, trim set to takeoff, mixture full rich, flaps up for standard takeoff, engine in the green, transponder set to 5131, and lights all on. I confirmed the altimeter was set to 30.06. It's time to go home.

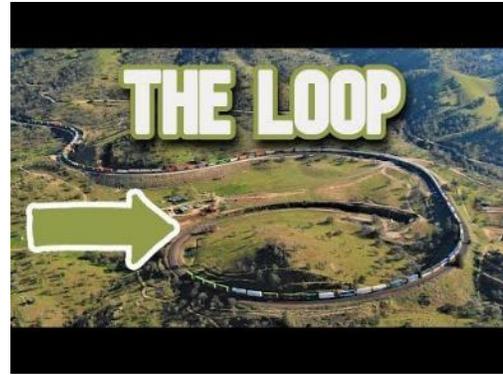
I pushed in power and taxied up to the hold short line and stopped in front of the double yellow solid lines. "Bakersfield tower, 8ED is holding short runway 12L at alpha 1-1, ready for takeoff with November." "8ED, winds 120 at 3, cleared for takeoff runway 12L." "8ED cleared for takeoff runway 12L." I pushed in a smidge of power, used left rudder to turn and line up on the centerline of 12L, and advanced the throttle all the way in. The airplane started rolling, engine at 2350 RPM and in the green, airspeed rising, reaching 55 KIAS, rotate, and we're off for the last leg of this adventure! That moment of leaving the ground always feels great!

I climbed away from KBFL at the best rate of climb. As I reached the end of the runway, I heard my tail number, "8ED, left turn-out approved." "left turn-out approved, 8ED." I turned left to intercept my planned flight path, continuing to climb. I noted that when I intercepted my planned flight path, I'd be on a 107° heading. Soon, I was on that heading over my planned flight path and I was still climbing. It seemed to be taking quite a while to climb to 7,500. Then, "8ED, contact Bakersfield departure on 126.45, Good day." "Over to Bakersfield departure, 126.45, and thanks for everything." "Bakersfield departure, Skyhawk 108ED checking in 4,800 climbing to 7,500." "Skyhawk 108ED, altimeter 3004." "3004, 8ED." As I approached the Tehachapi Mountains, I reached my cruise altitude, leveled off, set my power, and leaned the engine. My flight route follows highway 58 closely. Why? Because engineering, common sense and funding. Roads have slope limits called the road's "grade." If the grade is too steep it will be unsafe for cars. In fact, in very steep mountainous terrain, engineers resort to blasting tunnels through the mountain. Tunnels are obviously more expensive but required for safety in steep, rugged mountains. However, if you have a nice mountain pass available, that is the safest, easiest and cheapest place to build a road to cross a mountain. Here in Tehachapi, we have a nice mountain pass with a road. It also makes a nice route for airplanes to traverse mountains, because that's usually where the mountains have the lowest terrain.

As I reached my visual waypoint, which was a bend south in highway 58, I turned south to a heading of 138 to fly through the pass. As I flew through, I looked for the Tehachapi train loop. It wasn't one of my waypoints, but I'd seen it before when I flew to Porterville Airport with my friend Russ Erb in his experimental Bearhawk. Unfortunately, I never saw it. I did see where the train tracks made about three-quarters of an oval and wondered if that had any significance. The next day, I used the magic of google maps to see if I could pinpoint what I saw. I'm really not sure, but I think it



was where the train tracks wrap around the National Chavez



Center. I flew over the Tehachapi Mountains and continued south down the Tehachapi valley passing Tehachapi Municipal airport on my right. At this point in my journey, I had the aircraft trimmed for cruise and was just monitoring all the instruments and looking for other traffic. I had pushed the power up to 2450 RPM and kept it there because I knew I was returning the aircraft to the Aero Club late. "8ED, contact Joshua on 133.65." "Over to Joshua, 133.65. thank you, 8ED." Once upon a time, Bishoy and I were flying a dual flight and he asked me why I didn't listen to music in my headset during the flight. At the time, I thought that was a strange question. Turns out Bishoy listens to music he enjoys so he doesn't

get too bored during the flight. That makes sense because he's so experienced he only needs half his brain, so to speak, to fly the airplane. He needs music to keep the other half occupied. As I was flying along all alone, I started to see how it would be nice to have some music to pass the time. I'll wait until I get my license, but I'll be looking to download a playlist on my phone after I get some experience. It's funny what runs through your mind when you're thousands of feet in the air in an airplane all by yourself.

I continued on course and soon was crossing over the Rosamond Hills and the Tehachapi wind farm. I was almost home. The picture to the right is a picture I took as a passenger in a Bearhawk airplane, but the view I had from my Skyhawk was almost identical. As I looked down on the windmills disappearing behind me, I noted I was through the Rosamond Hills Mountain pass, and I started a shallow descent. I heard my tail number again, "8ED, contact Sport on 132.75." "Over to Sport, 132.75, thank you for your help, Joshua, 8ED." "You're welcome, 8ED, and before you go, there's traffic at your one o'clock crossing to your ten o'clock at 8,000 feet." "Copy, Joshua, I'll look for the traffic, but I'm starting my descent so it shouldn't be a factor." "Copy that, 8ED, have a good day." "Have a good day, 8ED." I pushed the button to switch Sport into comm 1 primary and noted it switched and turned green. "Sport, Skyhawk 108ED, with you descending through 6,800 to 3,300, request westgate arrival." "8ED, welcome back, westgate arrival approved." "Westgate approved, thank you, 8ED." I changed comm 1 standby to Eddie tower frequency (120.7)



**Pic of Tehachapi Windmills taken from Russ Erb's Bearhawk**

and entered Edwards ATIS into comm 2 and Edwards ground into comm 2 standby. Edwards information Golf told me the winds were 214 at 13, they were landing 23, and altimeter was 3002. I dialed in the altimeter setting, pushed the button to stop monitoring ATIS, and switched Edwards ground into the primary comm 2 position. After I flew far enough south to avoid flying over Rosamond Skypark airfield, I turned east toward Edwards westgate. I was now in familiar "stomping grounds" and didn't really need my Foreflight maps anymore. I was on the home stretch.

As I approached westgate, I was about to report westgate to Sport, but I heard, “8ED, contact Edwards tower on 120.7” “Over to tower 120.7, thank you, 8ED.” I switched tower into comm 1, “Edwards tower, Skyhawk 108ED, passing westgate with Golf, request full stop at South Base.” Then, I heard about a 10-20 second treatise from Eddie tower. I can’t even begin to remember everything he said, but he was telling me he had a lot of traffic. There was traffic taking off and a helicopter somewhere on the field. He gave me instructions, then changed his mind and revised the instructions and told me after that he’d get me to South Base. I was a bit confused, but I repeated back what I thought was the important details, “Edwards tower, 8ED will report a right base for runway 23L and await further instructions.” I must have had some doubt or question in my voice, because he came back with this, “8ED continue current heading and I’ll get you over to South Base in a minute.” “8ED will continue current heading.” As I flew in just south of Rosamond Boulevard, a BONE (B-1B Lancer bomber) took off from runway 23L. He climbed away from the runway with his wings swept forward, executed an aggressive 60°+ roll to turn (enough to show me the bottom of the plane), and then accelerated south. As he leveled his wings on the south heading and accelerated, the wings start to sweep back a bit.” What a show! I had a fantastic vantage point. This is one of the wonderful benefits of flying out of Eddie Air Patch.

I heard Eddie tower talking to the helicopter. He told them he had incoming traffic to South Base (me) and asked them if they were going to stay close to their current area. The helicopter pilot told tower that they would be “hanging out here for a while.” Then I got a call from tower, “8ED, fly direct South Base and report a left downwind for runway 25, traffic is a helicopter over the approach end of 23L, no factor.” “8ED will go direct South Base and report left downwind for runway 25.” I turned toward South Base and set myself up on a left downwind. I looked down at the ramp to see if the Aero Club truck was waiting. I didn’t see it. I completed my Before Landing GUMPS check, “Edwards tower, 8ED, left midfield downwind runway 25.” “8ED, winds 214 at 14 gusting to 19, report off runway.” “8ED will report off runway.” At the perch point, I pulled power and started configuring my airplane. I executed my normal landing sequence except on final I left 20° of flaps due to the gusts and kept my airspeed up to 70 KIAS. There was a left quartering gusty headwind. I touched softly on the upwind wheel (left) and then the right wheel softly touched down. My last landing was the best one of the day.

I turned off the runway, “Edwards tower, 8ED is clear of runway 25.” “Copy, 8ED, are you going to taxi back and fly to main base?” “Well, I’ve got an instructor to pick up. I’m going to taxi to the ramp and pick him up and we’ll be back with you momentarily, 8ED.” “Copy that 8ED, taxi to the ramp and monitor this frequency.” “Taxi to ramp and monitor this frequency, 8ED.” I completed my after-landing check. I had already raised the flaps on the runway. I turned off the strobes and landing light and set the mixture to ground lean. I taxied to South Base ramp -- nobody around. I picked up my phone and called Bishoy. He answered the phone and I said, “Hey bro, are you going to come pick me up?” He said, “Are you back already? I didn’t know you were that close.” “Yep, I’m here.” “OK, I’m still at the Aero Club, we’ll hop in the truck and be there in a few minutes.” “OK I’ll shut down the engine and wait for you.” “Sounds good.” I pulled out the checklist and used it to shut down the engine. I shut down at 1309L. I had just completed a three-and-a-half-hour flight day.

After I shut down the engine, I opened both windows to get some air in the cockpit, pushed my seat all the way back, and stretched my legs. I relaxed while waiting for Bishoy to arrive. I thought about the trip and laughed out loud. It was a good trip. I made some mistakes, but overall, I was very pleased. Here are my main takeaways from this learning experience:

Preparation is the key to any flight, *especially* a cross-country trip. I had studied my route and destination airport and was well prepared. The better prepared you are, the easier and safer the flight. Because I was prepared, I wasn’t surprised by anything, and I didn’t encounter anything I couldn’t handle. I am reminded of Ben Franklin’s quote, “By failing to prepare, you’re preparing to fail.” I’ll take this lesson to heart for all my flying career. If I haven’t adequately prepared for a flight, I won’t fly.

Radio communication with air traffic control (ATC) was easier than I thought it would be. I now realize that 99% of our ATC brothers are good people who are very friendly and more than willing to help you in any way. As long as you’re polite and respectful, all you have to do is ask. I don’t have to be afraid or nervous to talk to them. Even when you make mistakes, they are there to help you. I still don’t know what happened with my comms to Bakersfield ground, but the tower controllers willingly helped me and were extremely nice. I will continue to work on improving my communication skills, but I now know I don’t have to be nervous about communicating with them.

I learned that anytime you don’t have a stable final approach, just go around. I knew this intellectually, but I guess I had to experience a bad approach leading to a bad landing to truly understand. My approach at Bakersfield was not good. I knew it, but thought it was good enough that I could land safely. I did land safely, but it wasn’t a good landing. I encountered an issue during the landing roll that I’d never seen before. Even though I handled it, I wouldn’t have had to if I’d just performed a go-around and tried again.

The Aero Club truck rolled up beside the airplane and Bishoy hopped out of the truck and into the airplane. He said, "How'd it go?" I grinned and responded, "I can't believe I just did that!" He laughed and said, "Make sure you put that line in the story you're going to write." We laughed. I told him, "I made some mistakes I can learn from, but it was good trip. I had fun and learned a lot." He said, "That sounds great!" We flew back to main base, put 108ED to bed, did a short debrief, and called it a day.

Yes, my body was physically in the state of California, but my mind was in a state of surreality. It still hasn't completely sunk in. Days after, I'm still thinking, "Wow! I really did that!" I've been dreaming of this for so long, it just doesn't seem real, yet. Even if it seems surreal, that first solo cross-country is in my logbook. As I gain more solo PIC experience it will start to feel real. And one of these days in the near future, if I play my cards right, I'll have a little plastic card that says I'm a pilot. Remember, as a man named Harry Styles is known to have said, "A dream is only a dream until you decide to make it real."



- **Glenn Nicholson**  
USAF Lt Col (Retired)  
Student Pilot